

The Situation, Causes and Trends of Terrorism Crimes in Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

Central Asia has gradually become the place where terrorism broke out and the source of terrorism, and the risk of terrorist attacks is increasing. Political factors are the endogenous factors for the spread of terrorism and extremism in Central Asia. Poverty and political turmoil have given Central Asian terrorism a social foundation for the people. The return of terrorists has made the anti-terrorism situation in Central Asia extremely complicated. In the future, it is necessary to strengthen international anti-terrorism criminal judicial cooperation in order to effectively control terrorism and extremism.

Keywords: *Central Asia, Terrorism, Causes, Judicial cooperation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Islam entered a stage of full-scale revival in Central Asia, and religious extremism also spread widely. With the changes in the international situation, religious extremist forces have begun to combine with national separatist forces and international terrorist forces, aiming to overthrow the secular state power that is separated from religion and state, and establish a state system that combines politics and religion, which provides an ideological basis for the emergence of terrorism and challenges the secular regimes of Central Asian countries.

2. THE OVERALL SITUATION OF TERRORISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

At present, there are dozens of international terrorist organizations in Central Asia: "Uzbekistan Islamic Movement" and "Islamic Liberation Party",

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"East Turkistan Islamic Movement", "East Turkistan Islamic Party", "East Turkistan Liberation Organization", "Confessional Party", "Islamic Caliphate", "Uzbek Hezbollah", "Islamic Justice Party", "Central Asian Mujahideen Alliance" and so on. Among them, terrorist organizations such as the "Uzbekistan Islamic Movement", the "Islamic Liberation Party" and the "East Turkistan Islamic Movement" are the most harmful and have caused many terrorist incidents. The border between southern Central Asia and Afghanistan, Fergana in the center, and western Kazakhstan remain the areas with the highest security risks. According to the "Global Terrorism Index" released by the British Institute of Economics and Peace in 2019, Afghanistan's terrorism index is 9.603, ranking first in the global terrorism risk level, while Pakistan is 7.889, ranking fifth. Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are all in the top ninety.

Some scholars believe that as Central Asian countries continue to strengthen their efforts to combat terrorism, the situation of Central Asian terrorism has shown the characteristics that security risks are generally controllable, the return of terrorists has intensified, the spread of extremism and terrorism through the Internet has increased, and terrorists have become younger. [1]

The breeding and spread of terrorism in Central Asian countries has caused extremely serious social

harm. The first is that it seriously disrupted the social security environment in Central Asia. The national separatist, terrorist, and religious extremist forces in Central Asia colluded with terrorist forces such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda, and Chechnya separatists. The main goal of training terrorists based in Central Asia is to disrupt the stability of the region, so as to take the opportunity to gain power and introduce the Islamic regime model. A series of terrorist and criminal activities such as murder, robbery, kidnapping and extortion, arson and explosion in Central Asian countries seriously threaten the national security interests of Central Asia. In recent years, under the influence or direct command of the Islamic State, terrorists from Central Asian countries have made many terrorist attacks with greater impact in the international arena. On April 3, 2017, two bombings occurred in the St. Petersburg subway in Russia. The Russian Federal Security Department classified them as terrorist attacks. The bombings killed 16 people, including the attackers, and injured more than 50 people. It is particularly noteworthy that in order to raise funds for terrorist activities, terrorist and extremist organizations use their geographic location close to Afghanistan, the world's largest drug base, to engage in drug smuggling and trafficking activities, forming a transnational criminal corridor across Europe and Asia. As early as 2001, Kyrgyz President Akayev clearly pointed out that terrorism and religious extremism are inseparable from drug smuggling, and that Central Asian terrorism and drug trafficking organizations collude with each other.[2] According to government officials in Kazakhstan, the "Uzbekistan" members entrenched in southern Kyrgyzstan control 70% of the drugs entering Central Asia from Afghanistan. [3] The confluence of drugs and terrorism in Central Asian countries has seriously undermined the social stability and economic development of Central Asia. The second is that the spread and penetration of terrorism in Central Asia has seriously threatened China's national security. According to data, the "East Turkistan" terrorists are inextricably linked with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the terrorist forces in Central Asia. They not only pose a threat to countries in Central Asia, but also the "East Turkistan" terrorist forces have long been entrenched in Central Asia. They regard Central Asia as their frontier for terrorist activities in Xinjiang, China, and it has become one of the main terrorist threats facing China. In particular, China and Central Asian countries have a common border of more than 3,000 kilometers. The construction of

the "Silk Road Economic Belt" guided by the interconnection of infrastructure is vulnerable to terrorist attacks or unrest. [4] The terrorists returning from the Middle East to Central Asia are carrying many "East Turkistan" terrorists, posing a major threat to China's interests and security in Central Asia. With the deepening of China's "the Belt and Road Initiative" and the expansion of China's national interests in Central Asia, Chinese institutions and personnel in the region are increasingly becoming the key targets of terrorist attacks. On August 30, 2016, a car bomb attack occurred next to the Chinese Embassy in Kyrgyzstan. An investigation by the Kyrgyz security department revealed that the executor of the suicide bombing attacked the Chinese Embassy in Kyrgyzstan was a member of the "East Turkistan Islamic Movement".

3. THE MAIN REASON FOR THE GROWTH OF TERRORISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia has become a place where terrorism broke out and where it originated. There are profound historical and practical reasons for it. First, political factors are endogenous factors for the spread of terrorism and extremism in Central Asia. At home, political conflicts caused by religious and ethnic conflicts are the root of extremism in Central Asian countries. Some scholars pointed out that terrorism in Central Asia is mainly a political issue, and to a large extent it is an issue of ethnic conflicts in or around the country.[5] Dr. Stoop believes that in Central Asia, with the decline of state power, the economic, social and political life of the region has also deteriorated. At the same time, various public and political forces have also used terrorism and political extremism in their power struggles. With the increasing influence of religion on all aspects of social and political life in Central Asia, religious factors have become more and more important in determining the reasons and conditions for the growth of political extremism. [6] At the international level, geopolitics has led to continuous political wrestling and conflicts among Central Asian countries, giving extremism and terrorism room for survival and development. Central Asia is located in the heart of the Eurasian continent and is the "heartland" of international politics. The special geographical location and abundant resources have made it the focus of various political forces on the international political stage. British strategist Mackinder once asserted that whoever rules Central

Asia controls the world. The conflicts of interest between various external forces and the mistrust and tension between Central Asian countries on some issues have impeded the integration process, including the military and political fields, and hindered the coordination of policies by countries in the region and the international community in the collective fight against international terrorism. [7] After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries were in a period of social, political, and economic transition, with frequent changes in political power, and the existing borders and ethnic divisions were not completely consistent, which could be easy to induce ethnic and religious disputes, and even evolve into conflicts between countries, causing instability in the regional situation. Geopolitical struggles have led to a complicated anti-terrorism situation. International counter-extremism practice has proved that in a complex and changeable international environment, geopolitical factors can be described as a catalyst for the spread of extremism. Extremist forces are no longer purely criminal organizations, but as pawns in geopolitical competition. In order to obtain geopolitical benefits, some major powers sometimes attacked and sometimes condoned. It is precisely because of external support that some extremist forces have been repeatedly banned but still existing in Central Asian countries.

Second, there are socio-economic reasons. Terrorism and extremism everywhere are closely related to the local backward economic situation. "Poverty is not a crime, but it is the source of social unrest and hatred." [8] Originally, the five Central Asian countries were one of the least developed regions in the Soviet economy before independence. In recent years, the economic situation of Central Asian countries has deteriorated. The centralized bureaucratic economy and serious social corruption have exacerbated social poverty, unemployment has increased, comprehensive economic indicators have fallen sharply, and the gap between the rich and the poor has been wider. The severe economic situation has led to a proliferation of social problems, which has led to an increase in crime and social conflict, deterioration in ethnic relations, and deterioration in the security situation in some areas. Poverty and political turmoil have given Central Asian terrorism a social basis for its existence among the people. [9] At the same time, a large number of domestic immigrants migrated abroad to get rid of poverty, and their immigration destination countries,

whether Russia or Kazakhstan, are showing a situation of downward economic indicators. The living environment of young immigrants has deteriorated, and extremism and terrorism use social dissatisfaction to recruit terrorists. As Mikhail, chairman of the Independent Human Rights Association of Uzbekistan, said, "Smashing Izabut and the Uzbek Islamic Movement did not make Uzbekistan safer, because the real problem has not been resolved... the authorities' strategy of maintaining stability is impossible. Within one year, people will see that in the context of economic recession and lack of political power, the number of domestic arrests, trials, and terrorist incidents will continue to rise, and the political situation will continue to deteriorate... It is impossible to solve the terrorism problem in Central Asia by only relying on the support of the United States' anti-terrorism war in Afghanistan to obtain military and financial assistance. The problem must be solved by resolving the domestic problems in the region and satisfying the needs of the local people. Residents who are well-fed and live and work in peace will not provide new members for the Uzbek Islamic Movement." This also shows from the side that the poor socio-economic situation of Central Asian countries provides the social soil for the breeding and development of terrorism and extremism. [10]

Third, there are also the immigration factors. Terrorist organizations use social networks to establish interactive relationships, conduct online and offline double penetration, target young immigrants who are not recognized by other countries, and focus on stimulating the sense of identity, belonging and mission of young people abroad. Some immigrants gradually accepted "jihad" thoughts and put them into action during the migration process, and became people who spread extreme thoughts. Thus, groups of outbound "jihad" gradually formed. Immigration activities provide conditions for the "spillover" of terrorism. On the other hand, the return of terrorists has made the anti-terrorism situation in Central Asia extremely complex. Central Asian countries are adjacent to several countries including Afghanistan, which has the highest terrorism risk index in the world, and the risk of terrorism and extremism is extremely high. Foreign Islamic extremist forces not only promote extremist political ideas in Central Asia, but also provide funds and weapons to Central Asian Islamic extremist organizations, help establish military training camps, train new members, and collaborate with Central Asian

Islamic extremist organizations to create various types of terrorist incidents. What is more noteworthy is that with the intensified anti-terrorism efforts in Central Asia in recent years, many terrorists have returned to Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. According to statistics, there are about 3,000 Central Asian terrorists active in the "Islamic State". These people began to return as early as 2015, and the return speed accelerated in 2016, causing many terrorist attacks in Central Asia. Other data show that in the first half of 2019, the Kazakh government repatriated 595 Kazakh terrorists and their families from Syria. Also in 2019, the Uzbek government repatriated 220 foreign terrorist families from Iraq and Syria. Most of them are women and children. The Tajik government repatriated 95 people. In Kyrgyzstan, more than 300 foreign terrorists suspected of terrorism have been repatriated. Uzbekistan's assessment of the risks of terrorism and extremism directly indicated that the return of the "Islamic State" militants in Iraq and Syria and the radicalization of terrorism by Uzbeks abroad have brought a major risk of terrorism to the country.

4. DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OF TERRORISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

As Central Asian countries continue to improve their legal systems, for example, legislation has clearly clarified the concept of greater ambiguity, explained the terms "traditional religion," "non-traditional religion," "destructive organization," and "destructive activity," and implemented strict precautions. The measures, of course, have greatly improved the effectiveness of combating terrorism. In 2019, neither Kyrgyzstan nor Turkmenistan reported any terrorist incidents. It shows that the terrorist activities of Kyrgyzstan have been controlled to a considerable extent.

However, another aspect that cannot be ignored is that continuous improvement of the level of legislation and counter-terrorism measures will stimulate terrorists to implement terrorist activities in a more concealed manner, which in turn leads to further increase in the difficulty of combating and preventing and controlling. For example, terrorists use cars and other non-prohibited and non-explosive materials to carry out terrorist attacks; they do everything possible to use loopholes in border control control in various places to return to other places to carry out terrorist activities. Taking Kyrgyzstan as an example, in 2019, there will be

terrorists who are constantly exporting and returning. According to statistics from the Kyrgyz government, about 850 Kyrgyz citizens left the country to join the "Islamic State" or other terrorist groups. The actual situation may be more serious. Other Central Asian countries also have border control problems such as unclear borders and lax controls. Terrorists and illegal items can move in and out relatively freely, and they are also facing the same realistic problems in the export and return of terrorists. In addition, in response to increasingly intensified counter-terrorism measures, terrorists have adopted a "dormant" approach to lurking in social groups to look for opportunities. What's more, after the terrorists went to prison, they still advertised terrorism and extremism in the prison, instigating and inciting other prisoners to carry out violent terrorist activities. At the same time, from offline to online, they use technology to develop APP software with violent and extreme content to carry out cyber terrorist activities.

5. CONCLUSION

The complicated social background and special geographical location determine that terrorism and extremism in Central Asia will not disappear easily. According to UN data, there are about 1,500 terrorist training camps in the world, mainly in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan. As long as the corresponding social soil and international conditions still exist, the threats to the security and stability of Central Asia by the "three forces" in Central Asia colluding with international terrorist forces cannot be underestimated, and the confrontation between Central Asian countries and terrorism and extremism will exist for a long time. [11]

Therefore, to combat terrorism and extremism, countries in Central Asia need to strengthen international anti-terrorist criminal justice cooperation, especially focusing on cooperation with China on the basis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, study and compare the differences in the anti-terrorism criminal legal systems between countries, and coordinate the consistency of the anti-terrorism legal systems in legislation within countries, to effectively prevent and combat terrorism crimes in Central Asia.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Gang Luo.

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